

NEWSLETTER 11

August 2014

Intergenerational learning: Some questions arising from the GATE learning partnership

The aim of the GATE (Generations Ageing Together in Europe) project was to focus attention on how generations 'age' together in today's Europe and where education and learning have a role to play in developing active-ageing strategies.

Critical reflections

The GATE Grundtvig Learning Partnership [Prog. N. 2012-1-GB2-GRU06-08455-2] held meetings with older people, education-ists, older people's organisations, and agencies involved in active-ageing initiatives in Belfast (Northern Ireland), Graz (Austria), Valencia (Spain), Roccalamura (Sicily) and Trentino (Northern Italy):

- To facilitate discussion and debate on active ageing among learners and the partner organisations. What does it mean? How can it be achieved?
- To enable the exchange of knowledge, experiences and good practice in promoting and engaging older people in active-ageing strategies.
- To encourage critical reflection on current practices.
- To increase knowledge of active-ageing strategies and programmes in partner countries.
- To examine and explore the role of education and learning in active-ageing strategies.

GATE produced a guide to active ageing which is available on the programme's website and provides profiles of all the partners:

<http://gateproject.wikispaces.com>

Intergenerational learning

In reaching its conclusions the GATE project also looked at current and recent (good) practice in intergenerational learning, some of the contexts for such learning – healthy and active ageing, mutual learning, volunteering, life-course perspectives – as well as providing a background picture of each country in terms of population, demography, national and regional policies as they impact on 'ageing' issues and older people.

The research, the consultations and the discussions, also involving the UK partner that did not host a meeting from Leicester (England), gave rise as part of the GATE legacy to: -

- the Gate Guide to Active Ageing.
- the conclusions below.
- the two questions which the partnership felt should be raised and debated to understand and evaluate better the notions and practice of mutual and intergenerational learning in the future.

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Conclusions – great benefits

Learning in later life can bring great benefits for the ageing society. It can empower older people and enable them to live more fulfilling and independent lives. Learning can lead to improved health and well-being and reduced loneliness and social isolation. In short, learning promotes active ageing.

There are also wider benefits of learning in an ageing society – these can accrue to older people's families and communities, and for the state itself, for example in terms of less public expenditure on health and social care. Investment in learning opportunities and activities can pay huge dividends for society and the state.

Lifelong learning is a means to bring about personal development, social cohesion and active citizenship as well as new and updated skills and competencies. In 2012, the European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong learning (EUCIS–LLL) published its manifesto *Twelve Years After* in which it called for a renewed and updated European memorandum on lifelong learning¹. In this concise paper, EUCIS–LLL stressed the important goal of personal fulfilment and

enrichment for lifelong-learning activities 'enabling each individual to achieve all his/her potentialities'. This surely should apply equally to older people and underlines the vital role of learning in active ageing.

There are strong arguments for seeing the changing demographic structure of Europe in a positive light. European societies are becoming more mature and wise. With the right approach, the ageing society can bring real social, cultural, political, economic and personal rewards. Active ageing can help realise these benefits for individuals and for the wider community and society. Investment in lifelong-learning courses and activities is a critical means to unlock these riches.

The added value of GATE

Population ageing is happening across all European countries. Europeans face common challenges and opportunities that this changing demographic brings. Intercultural differences and understanding may be improved by the sharing of experiences and knowledge of all member states. The GATE project has given the partners the opportunity to learn from each other and to forge supportive bonds. The project has helped increase understanding of social cohesion, participative citizenship

¹ <http://www.eucis-lll.eu/eucis-lll/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/A-call-for-a-renewed-Memorandum-on-Lifelong-Learning-EUCIS-LLL1.pdf>

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and European awareness among all the partners and has encouraged the transnational circulation of educational best practice and know-how.

GATE has contributed to new approaches to intercultural dialogue among European countries. It has benefited the participating institutions by developing innovative practices in adult education and applying them in the teaching and learning process.

Mutual understanding

Working at a European level fosters the role of common historical heritage as a means to increase the mutual understanding of different cultures allowing all partners to experience the richness of European languages. Older people were given the opportunity to learn more about other EU countries and experience new cultures and customs giving them an opportunity to learn how to deal with unfamiliar situations and adapt more readily to complex and different environments.

The GATE project also helped to promote European awareness. Older people may not feel as much part of the European Union as many younger people do and so through participation in this project older learners have been able to adopt a stronger sense of their European identity and a greater

understanding and awareness of European cultural heritage.

Two key questions

The GATE partners agreed that further questions that arise as a consequence of evaluating initiatives of 'ageing together' or intergenerational learning include these:

1) There have been many inter-generational learning opportunities, projects and networks in recent years but fewer focussing on mutual aspects of ageing or shared learning around ageing.

Do you feel that the claims that such experiences bring benefits to our society have been justified?

2) This is a time of rapid change, economic uncertainty, a large reliance on technology, the emergence of social media as one of our main communication channels, and an apparent lessening of trust in politicians and decision makers at local, regional, national and pan-European levels.

Can you suggest ways (and provide examples) of how active-ageing initiatives and strategies are (or can be) effective in allowing all members of our communities to cope with these changes and remain economically and socially active?

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